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STRENGTHENING OF THE COORDINATION OF HUMANITARIAN AND DISASTER RELIEF ASSISTANCE OF THE UNITED NATIONS, INCLUDING SPECIAL ECONOMIC ASSISTANCE
REPORT OF THE UNITED NATIONS HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR REFUGEES, QUESTIONS RELATING TO REFUGEES, RETURNEES AND DISPLACED PERSONS AND HUMANITARIAN QUESTIONS
HUMAN RIGHTS QUESTIONS

SECURITY COUNCIL
Fifty-fourth year

Letter dated 22 October 1999 from the Permanent Representative of Eritrea to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

I have the honour to forward the attached press release issued by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the State of Eritrea on 21 October 1999 on the deportation of ethnic Eritreans by the Ethiopian Government through the war zone in defiance of the arrangements made by the International Committee of the Red Cross.

I should be grateful if you would kindly circulate the present letter and its annex as a document of the General Assembly, under agenda items 20, 111 and 116, and of the Security Council.

(Signed) Haile MENKERIOS
Ambassador
Permanent Representative

* Reissued for technical reasons.

Annex

Press release: Tigray People's Liberation Front deports ethnic Eritreans through war zone in defiance of arrangements made by the International Committee of the Red Cross

The Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) regime rounded up 1,300 ethnic Eritreans in Addis Ababa yesterday evening and loaded them on 29 buses for deportation through the war zone. According to the office of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) in Addis Ababa, the deportees are likely to be dumped at the Burie Front tomorrow night.

The TPLF regime is perpetrating this act precisely at a time when ICRC has been conducting discussions with both Governments on a scheme for airlifting the deportees. This has become necessary because the usual exit points through which TPLF has deported the 63,000 ethnic Eritreans at previous times are not safe or accessible anymore owing to heightened tension. (Many of the deportees are also critically ill.) The fact is TPLF has virtually completed its preparations and seems set to launch an all-out offensive any day now.

The underlying motive to deport these people at this time is in itself suspect as these people were evicted from their homes and businesses more than six months ago. TPLF has refused to let them go before, claiming that the exit points in the border areas "are insecure".

The callous act by TPLF, which may endanger the lives of these helpless deportees, is a vivid illustration of its disrespect of human life and international law. It also illustrates the contempt with which it holds the international community. Indeed, the Ethiopian Prime Minister had assured the ICRC President during his visit to Addis Ababa in August that his regime "would refrain from further deportations". And only last week, the Joint Assembly of the Group of African, Caribbean and Pacific States and the European Union called upon "the Council of the European Union to prevail upon Ethiopia to accept and implement the peace package of the Organization of African Unity (OAU) *and prevent the continued violation of the human rights of ethnic Eritreans in Ethiopia*".

On the other hand, it is clear that Ethiopia has continued to perpetrate these violations with impunity because international reaction has been feeble throughout.

But the present act should not be tolerated. The safety of the deportees is at great risk as they may be caught in crossfire that TPLF may provoke or other hazards of war.

The international community must therefore prevail upon Ethiopia and demand, in strong and clear terms, that it rescind this action and ensure that these people are deported safely through the arrangements that ICRC has been working on. The Government of Eritrea will, as always, receive its nationals but the TPLF regime shall assume responsibility for any consequences that may ensue.